

## [Macy's]

Beliefs & Customs - Folk Stuff 13

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 29 1/2 Morton Street #2B

DATE

SUBJECT Lore of Department Store Workers

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview 112 E. 19th Street, N.Y.C. (Union Headquarters, Dept. Store Workers Local 1250)
3. Name and address of informant Irving Fajans 112 E. 19th Street New York City
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 29 1/2 Morton Street #2B

DATE

SUBJECT Lore of Department Store Workers

“....First, when you get a job at MACY'S, they start you in the Stock Room - if you're new, that is. I was two years out of high school when I got on there. I worked for Macy's five years — not all the time in stock — I did some selling on the Floor too, and I worked in the Tube Room, where they make change. They figure you lucky if you get out of stock. Some guys have been there twenty, twenty-five years. They learn one routine job in one department, and then even if they move on to other houses, they'll be placed on the same job because of experience. Most of the workers, men that is, are trained in stock, and a few of them get into other departments if the boss figures they got something on the ball...which isn't often.

“All Macy's employees have to take intelligence tests before they're hired... the same thing goes for most of the larger houses. Funny thing about those tests, they don't hire you if your average is too high — not to start anyway. If your quotient runs between 90 and 110, you'll get by easier. See, they figure if a worker's too smart, he's liable to get a notion he

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doesn't like the way things are done — get sore and quit, and maybe start the others to getting dissatisfied too.

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On the other hand, if he's too dumb, then he can't handle the job... so don't be too smart or too dumb.

"In Macy's the stock takes up eight floors — from the 10th to the 18th. Besides they have a warehouse for merchandise, which is a whole block square. The merchandise comes in on trucks, is unloaded on the receiving platform, and then sent to the stock rooms. Then the Checkers look it over, mark down the quantity, and report on any damages in the stock. After that, it's priced — price tags, pin tickets, gum labels, or string labels put on. Then it's sent to the reserve. The reserve room is just long aisles of shelves, where the Pickers and Distributors classify the stock. When the merchandise is ordered from the Selling Floor, it's either sent down the chutes, or taken down on small floor trucks, or "wheelers." They use women mostly for markers and examiners, that is to examine the stock for flaws, like silk stockings for instance, and for marking the quantity. The pickers and distributors and truckers are all men. It's one hell of a job sometimes to keep up with the orders from the floor... You gotta take it on the run along the shelves, grab the order and load the trucks, or shove it down the chute. Lots of times it'll be a Customer Waiting order, and that means hurry it up... they ought to put the guys on roller skates, then maybe they'd get somewhere like the right kind of speed out of them.

There's a Supervisor to each floor, who's generally snooping around hoping to catch you loafing on the job. Mostly the workers call them 'Supers'... when I was there, we called them 'Snoopers'....

"There was one super we had was a tough guy... I'm not mentioning any names ... but he had a voice like a dog's bite. He was proud of the way he could lash speed out of the boys picking stock. One Christmas, we all chipped in and bought him a whip — a 3 horse whip

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— one of those old fashioned ones. He must have caught on to the idea o.k. because he came back after the holiday's with a pretty sour face, and gave us tougher treatment than before... But before long he was fired out, and we had another super. He was good egg. We got to calling him "One Gong Stevens." That was on account of the fire drills. Every so often Macy's would have a fire drill, and we'd all have to leave the building for a few minutes. One day we were especially rushed handling some new stock, and the fire gong rings. Three gongs means everybody out. This time the super got mad at the fireman, and after he rang one gong, he told him to lay off and come back another time, we were too busy. So after that we called him "One Gong Stevens" — sort of a silly monicker, I guess.

"Working conditions are much better in Macy's than when I used to work there. The place has been fairly well unionized. When I first started there, they were just beginning to try to organize, and everything pertaining to the union had to be on the q.t. If you were caught distriubting distributing leaflets, or other union literature around the job you were instantly fired. We thought up ways of passing leaflets without the boss being able to pin anybody down. Sometimes we'd insert the leaflets into the sales ledgers after closing time. All the sales books were kept in the same place, so it was easy. In the morning every clerk would find a pink sheet saying: "Good Morning, how's everything ... and how about coming to Union meeting tonight..." or something like that. Another idea we had — we swiped the key to the toilet paper dispensers the washroom, took out the paper and substituted printed slips of just the right [size?!] We got a lot of new members that way - it appealed to their sense of humor. We also used to store chutes, and when sending down a load of merchandise, would toll down a bunch of leaflets 4 with it, while the super had his back turned. They'd all scatter out on the receiving end, and the clerks would pick them up when they handled the stock. The floorwalker might be coming along and see those pink sheets all over the place — he'd get sore as hell — but what could he do? No way of telling who did it.

"There was one grievance we had that was pain in the neck for all the workers, not only union members. That was the [MMAA?] system. Macy's Mutual Aid Association. it's a

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hospital set up in the store for aid of the employees, and a percentage of your salary each week is confiscated to maintain it. The idea of Macy's looking out for the / health of their employees is alright, except that if you needed any attention there, you had to pay for it about the same as at any other hospital, and in addition give part of your check for the upkeep.

"In the stock room we made up a song about the MMAA. It's to the tune of "The Daring Young Man On The Flying Trapeze," and goes like this: Once every week, when we [get?] out pay Macy's deducts for the MMAA Our small salaries that are shrinking each day Shouldn't be made any smaller, we say. For green pills and white pills and pink pills And payment of half of the rent For toothpulls and corn cures and other nick-nacks We shouldn't pay them a red cent...

"There are some more verses to it, but I can't remember them now...

"Yes, we used to have our squabbles with the bosses once in a while .... even in the Greatest Department Store in the World..."